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STATINTL

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Notes and Comment

ON March 24th, Representative John V. Tunney, a California Democrat who seeks his party's nomination for United States senator, addressed the Wilshire Chamber of Commerce in Los Angeles and made some charges about our involvement in Laos that have not, as far as we have been able to learn, previously been made. We yield the floor to the Congressman:

We are today engaged... in a secret war in Laos, a tribal war in which the C.I.A. has committed the United States to support a faction of Meo tribesmen, led by General Vang Pao, whose sole objective is to dominate other factions of this opium-producing Meo tribe throughout Northern Laos. The C.I.A. has involved us in this covert operation, which is being fought around the Plain of Jars, more than one thousand miles away from the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The Administration has deliberately veiled in secrecy our deepening involvement in an opium tribal war which has the potential to engulf all of Southeast Asia in a full-fledged conflict which would have global repercussions.... On grounds of moral indignation, as a defender of democracy, we have unwittingly allowed ourselves to become involved in a situation which, to the Meo tribesman or Laotian warlord, has very little to do with his major cash crop—opium. For this tribal war has, as one of its prizes, an area capable of producing, on an annual basis, four to ten tons of marketable opium. This is equal to from two to six million dollars in Laotian currency. Refined as heroin and sold on the streets of Los Angeles, it would bring nearly nine hundred million dollars.... The clandestine yet official operations of the United States government could be aiding and abetting heroin traffic here at home.

Representative Tunney is in the middle of a hard campaign, and this is, of course, campaign oratory. It so happens, though, that his adviser on Southeast Asian affairs is Professor John T. McAlister, Jr., of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, at Princeton, who is the author of "Viet-Nam: The Origins of Revolution" and is probably the most eminent scholar in the Southeast Asian field. Suspecting that it was on his authority that the candidate made these extraordinary assertions, we checked with the Professor and found that this was indeed the case. He would, he said, swear to the truth of them in any forum. The next move, we should think, would be up to Senator Fulbright.

MORI/CDF